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Remarks to Montana State Legislature

Max S. Baucus

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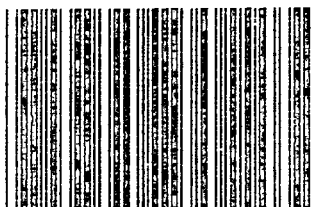
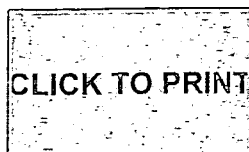
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(2) Subject* **Remarks to the Montana State Legislature**

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BAUCUS

Mark - this version is
in Max's book tonight.
FYI. - [signature]

Remarks of Senator Max Baucus
To the Montana State Legislature
Helena, Montana

March 18, 1995

Good morning. Speaker Mercer, President Brown, and members of our 54th Legislature, I thank you for inviting me to speak this morning.

And I thank you for your service to our state. You are Democrats and Republicans, conservatives and liberals. You come from the ranch, the classroom, the sawmill and the law office. Some of you are eighth-generation Montanans. Some are newcomers. Some of your families have been on Montana soil for five thousand years. But as our Governor said a few weeks ago, in Montana our similarities far outweigh our differences.

As the poet Dante Alighieri wrote, seven hundred years ago:

"Let there be no doubt in the mind of the man who has benefitted from the common heritage, but does not trouble to contribute to the common good, that he is failing sadly in his duty."

Our parents and our grandparents understood that. They lived by it. They left us a tradition of civility and small-town decency. A natural heritage of clean air, clean water and unspoiled natural wonders. A belief in open government, freedom and democracy.

That is an extraordinary legacy. No sum of money could buy it. And in our times as in theirs, its preservation depends on an informed, involved citizenry. We Montanans still understand that, and we still live by it. And this, the people's Legislature, is proof enough.

A FUNDAMENTAL DEBATE

I hope and I have faith that these Montana values will never change. But much else in the world is changing very quickly.

Modern roads, new telecommunications services, cable TV and satellite dishes, computers and modems, all combine to bring us closer to the big cities and the world markets than ever before. The end of the Cold War has changed our entire country's role in the world. Businesses are changing their ways to keep up. And government must do the same.

And thus, a fundamental, healthy debate has begun about the role of government. What role should government play in this new era? How can we make it more efficient? Which programs have run

their course, and which services are still essential?

Montanans are debating these questions in their homes; on the job; and here in the Legislature. At times these are heated debates. But as I think about them, and discuss them with my family, and listen to the views of Montanans, I find three basic principles on which most of us agree.

First, government must live within its means.

Second, government still has essential responsibilities.

And third, government must be closer and more responsive to the people.

LIVING WITHIN OUR MEANS

Let us start with the first. The government -- in particular, the federal government -- must live within its means.

Every year since 1981, we have borrowed between \$150 and \$200 billion. In that time, our national debt grew to nearly five trillion dollars. And it is still growing about 5% a year, faster than our economy will grow in the foreseeable future. So every year, the debt is bigger relative to our economy and interest rates swallow more of our national income.

Last year, for the first time, federal net interest payments topped \$200 billion. Next year it will be \$260 billion -- a thousand dollars for every American man, woman and child. And our country simply cannot live with that.

That is why I came to support the Balanced Budget Amendment. It was not a rapid decision. I took years to reach it. But when it comes to changing the Constitution, I think rapid decisions are bad decisions.

I believe, though, that we have now exhausted all other options. And I hope this Amendment will pass -- if not in this Congress, then in the next.

CUTTING WASTE

But even if it does not, Washington must learn to live within its means. And that will mean some pain here at home -- where for every dollar we pay in federal taxes, a dollar and fifty-one cents comes back. But we can begin by simply cutting wasteful government spending.

Last year I looked into overspending on federal courthouses.

I found judges in Boston, Phoenix and New York spending our taxpayers' money on rosewood panelling for their offices and private kitchens. And I cut \$180 million out of their budgets.

The intelligence services' National Reconnaissance Office in Northern Virginia, with a sauna and a fountain. Twelve million dollars for "TV Marti" to broadcast "Laverne and Shirley" reruns to Cuba at 3:00 a.m..

The Army Corps of Engineers. Taking thousands of acres of the best bottom land in the world from Roosevelt, McCone and Richland Counties and washing it into Lake Sakakawea. Costing us millions in tourism revenue at the Fort Peck Reservoir and the CMR. Taking our water year after year after year.

The Corps has committed abuses of such magnitude that, as Ken Byerly of the Lewistown News Argus puts it, fixing the problem is "a job as big as eating an elephant." Well, we're firing up the grill and ready to carve some steaks. And it may take years, but we will do the job.

Beyond this, however, there will be hard, painful decisions ahead. The Department of Agriculture is shutting some Montana field offices this year. I think they had to do it. Their decision makes sense, and we will see more like it in the future.

GOING TOO FAR

But our state has a valuable tradition of moderation. We reject extremism. We believe in balance. And we know that just like spending, cutting can go too far. As we eliminate the programs we don't need, we must protect the services we do need.

We need to make investments in the education of our children today if we want Montana to prosper tomorrow.

Last year, a federal grant helped Superintendent Svee buy a new computer system for kids in the Hardin School District. Another grant put the Townsend Library on the Internet. Federal help buys lunch and breakfast for young children all across the state. That is money well spent. For the federal government to cut it out would be wrong.

Here at home we must protect and invest in our public schools and universities. Our children deserve the same chance for success as kids from California, New York and Japan. We must never tell them to leave the Big Sky if they want their shot at the dream.

In other areas, cuts can hurt as well as help. Last year, for example, the Forest Service decided to move Region One to

Denver, hundreds of miles from the woods they're supposed to manage. Amtrak cut Empire Builder service on the Hi-line to four days a week at the height of the ski season. The USDA wants to eliminate research on leafy spurge -- a disease that costs producers \$144 million a year -- at the Sidney Research Station. Penny-wise, pound foolish mistakes.

The Air Force wants to move the tanker squadron at Malmstrom to MacDill Airfield in Florida. That takes 1,000 jobs out of Great Falls and -- more important -- weakens our defense. And President Clinton wants to sell the Western Area Power Administration, raising electric rates on small business and families.

ESSENTIAL SERVICES

All this illustrates the second principle -- that there are some essential services that only government can provide. Education is one.

Highways are another. Our farms, ranches, mines and mills need to be linked to the market with the best, most modern roads in the world. That costs money. When my National Highway System bill passes, the federal government will send us \$82 million a year. That roads it builds will contribute to our economy for decades. And each year, it will create three thousand construction jobs. High-paying new jobs that help us keep our kids at home. Does anyone imagine that we are better off refusing to invest that money?

What else must government do?

Protect senior citizens by keeping Social Security and Medicare strong.

Help small towns promote economic development, as the EDA did last year when mills closed in Libby and Superior, and A&S Industries on the Fort Peck Reservation needed helping converting from military to civilian industry.

Make sure we have clean air, clean water and clean neighborhoods. People in Billings deserve fresh air. People on the Clark Fork deserve safe drinking water.

Guarantee food safety.

Offer unemployment insurance and job training to working people in a tough spot.

Support our agriculture with a sound farm program.

Put police on the street to help our towns, counties and reservations keep their neighborhoods safe.

Keep the nation secure and pay the debt to our military veterans.

These are essential services. Our communities -- our state -- our nation -- need them. Our parents were willing to sacrifice to give us good educations. To keep our neighborhoods clean and safe. And to defend America. Because they sacrificed, we have the good life we now enjoy. And we must do the same for the next generation of Montana children.

CLOSER TO THE PEOPLE

And the third principle is this. While government has essential tasks, it does them best when it is closest to the people.

That's why I spend so much time walking. Out on the roads, you meet a lot of people. They tell you what's on their mind. What's going wrong, what's right. Where they need help and -- more often -- where they want to be left alone.

As our Founders understood, ordinary, middle-class people are pretty good at running their lives. And when government gets too big and adds too many layers of bureaucracy, it starts to forget that. It tries to do too much. And it starts to push people around instead of helping them out.

Here is an example. A month ago, some loggers who work in the Flathead, Kootenai and Bitterroot forests called my staffer Sue Tillett to a meeting. They said that OSHA, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, had ordered them to buy steel-toed, chainsaw-resistant boots to protect their feet. They had two weeks grace, and after that it was no boots, no work.

Well, steel-toed boots may sound good to someone at a desk in Washington. But here in Montana, they can make the job more dangerous, not less. On a cold day they make your feet go numb. When your feet go numb out on a steep hill, you can slip and fall. And that's no joke when you're holding a live chainsaw.

Because these loggers acted so fast, I was able to get to the Secretary of Labor. He agreed to stop the regulations, and last week he wrote me to say he wants to meet with the loggers personally. And though we're not done yet, I think we'll get a happy ending.

But the fact is, nobody at a desk in Washington should be telling people in the Flathead what kind of shoes to wear. Our

middle-class people -- the people who work, pay taxes, and keep the country going -- the people government is meant to serve -- understand their needs better than anyone else.

That's why I want to give Governor Racicot and people like Mayor Kurkowski of Miles City the power to say "no" to big city garbage entrepreneurs who want to dump on our prairie towns. Listen to their plan.

Trash would come in on empty coal trains running back out of Minneapolis. Each train 110 cars long, and each car fifty feet long, ten feet wide and eleven feet high. In total, a giant garbage snake over a mile long, shedding rotten food, broken glass and used diapers into the Yellowstone River at every bend in the track. Imagine that steaming into a small town on a hot summer day like a dry land Leviathan. It is a scandal. And Miles City should have the right to say "no."

So whenever possible, decisions should be local. And if they have to be national, people who make them need to get away from the bureaucracy. They should meet the people in person.

That's why I asked Mr. Reich to meet the Flathead loggers about OSHA. And it is why, when our Hi-Line grain producers went through the flood of Canadian wheat, I brought a few of them to the White House to meet Mike Espy and Bob Rubin. And that got results. A year ago, three hundred Canadian grain trucks a week were crossing the border at the Port of Sweetgrass. Once we almost hit four hundred. Today it's down to thirty a week.

LUCKY TO BE MONTANANS

But things like that don't happen often enough. A lot of Montanans are angry at the federal government. They are right to be angry. Government doesn't listen very much. Bureaucrats and special interests are too powerful.

And we have challenges that go well beyond government. The cost of health insurance. The price of housing. The slow growth of Montana incomes.

We must address those problems. We must work together to remedy those complaints. But every once in a while, we should also stop to appreciate our blessings.

We are lucky to be Americans.

We are at peace. For the first time in over sixty years -- for the first time since Adolf Hitler took power in 1933 -- America faces not a single deadly foreign threat.

We are prosperous. America's economy is booming; growing faster and creating more jobs than it has in a decade.

And we are lucky to be Montanans.

We live in the most beautiful place in the world. The land of the bear, the eagle and the cutthroat trout. Of wooded mountains and blue ribbon streams. As I walk our roads -- through a snowfall from Livingston over the windy hill to Bozeman -- down the Lewis and Clark route from Helena to the Missouri headwaters at Three Forks -- I appreciate it all the more.

We are decent people. I will never forget the waitress I met on a walk down the Bitterroot Valley to Hamilton last month. She was in her 60s, in a little coffee shop in Florence. Her husband had died a few years earlier. Ever since, she needed to work to replace the pension, and help support a sick daughter. She asked if I could help her with SSI. I said of course I would, but then she said she didn't want any special treatment, because a lot of people are worse off and needed help more.

We are good neighbors, in an age when so much of our country is beset by crime and the breakdown of civility. Billings stood as one against the skinheads and hate groups who targeted our Jewish community. The whole state came together in the effort to bring the MICRON company to Butte.

And our old-fashioned values are alive and well. In Montana, character counts more than money. People think more about their children than themselves. The basic principles of democracy are reality.

As the Athenian statesman Pericles said:

"Our city is called a democracy because it is governed by the many, not the few. In the realm of private disputes everyone is equal before the law, but when it is a matter of public honors each man is preferred not on the basis of his class but of his good reputation and his merit. No one, moreover, if he has it in him to do some good for the city, is barred because of poverty or humble origins."

That is still true here in the last, best place. All of you today are living proof. May the Lord bless your work, and continue to lend his grace to the land we love so much.

Thank you.